

How to Take an Oral Exam

Oral Communication Lab
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So you've got to take an Oral Exam and you're not quite sure what you're getting into. Never fear, the **OCL** is here with a three-step system for surefire success:

STEP #1: STRUCTURE YOUR ANSWER

- Start by picking apart the question; know what you're being asked!
- Brainstorm: Bullet all of the key terms and points that are relevant to your answer.
- From your bullet list and question analysis, come up with a general THESIS statement.
- Organize your many bullet points into a few key arguments you're going to make.
 - Depending on time restrictions, attempt to keep your key arguments to a maximum of 3 or 4.
 - Too few arguments causes too much unstructured narration.
 - Too many arguments jeopardizes thorough, concise answers.
- Use the hour glass model.
 - Introduce question, state THESIS, quickly preview your 3 or 4 arguments.
 - Give each argument and supporting information and tie each back to your THESIS.
 - Conclude by restating your THESIS and recapping your arguments .
- REMEMBER: **The best answers flow from a solid answer structure.**

STEP #2: PREPARE FOR THE EXAM

- TWO heads are better than ONE: Study your sources with friends.
- Connect your points to the supporting authors – professors love that!
- Practice, Practice, Practice!
 - Practice leads to content mastery.
 - Practice leads to confidence.
 - Practice makes perfect.
- Take your arguments and debate your study partners.
 - Debates with friends force you to understand your material to the fullest.
 - They help prepare you to defend your position.
- Time yourself in practice runs to get a sense of the clock.
- REMEMBER: **Practice, Practice, Practice!**

STEP #3: GIVE IT YOUR BEST DELIVERY

- DON'T PANIC
- The professor is on your side—
 - They want to give you an A+
 - Just give them an excuse to do it!
- Don't Be Nervous: A solid structure and plenty of practice go a long way in building your confidence.

- Create rapport with your professor.
 - Visit during office hours with questions and concerns.
 - Become a familiar face rather than just a name on a list of names.
 - Also, knowing your professor may help you gear your answers toward his or her preferences—Professors REALLY love that!!
- On test day it ISN'T all business.
 - SMILE!!!!
 - Shake hands.
 - Make small talk if time allows.
 - Create an interpersonal relationship with the person who holds the red pen.
- Before you begin, take a DEEP BREATH.
- Make good Eye Contact regularly.
- “Fast Talkers”—breathe more; “Slow Talkers”—stop rambling and get to the point.
 - You know which one you are.
 - Knowing yourself will help you to control your answer delivery.
- Use your hands.
 - Hand movements are expressive.
 - They show confidence.
- Use the clock to gauge your progress.
- REMEMBER: **Don't panic, and speak with confidence!**

SO, now you're armed with all the tools you need to knock your oral exam right out of the park. There is, of course, one assumption made: You need to keep up with the course material. You can't answer a question without the answer. Do your homework and you'll be ready to go when the Oral Exam pops up. Now get out there and show your professor just how smart you are!